

Traditional Cultural Properties in the National Register of Historic Places

Educating the Public About Cultural Heritage

Carol D. Shull

Americans are woefully uninformed about the history and the contributions of many cultural groups in the United States. Often they do not even know that contemporary traditional cultures exist. Our children are not taught about the events and places that embody the heritage of many of our peoples. Without this knowledge we cannot expect our people to respect, honor and assist in preserving the traditions and places that reflect the proud achievements and cultural heritage of all of us.

The National Register of Historic Places can be a powerful tool in cultural preservation by helping Americans learn about the diverse groups that have created this country. One only has to read the papers in this special issue of *CRM* to realize what an impact the publication of National Register Bulletin 38 and its affirmation that traditional cultural properties are eligible for the National Register have had in educating us about the values of traditional cultural properties. National Register Bulletin 38 and the work that has followed have sensitized us to the need for traditional cultural groups; ethnohistorians; archeologists; ethnographers; federal, State, and local officials; and project sponsors to work together to develop appropriate strategies for identifying, documenting, registering, and preserving them. These papers suggest some of the important strategies for the future that have been learned in the field. Most importantly, traditional cultural groups are finding that the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Register apply equally to them, to their history, and to the places they treasure as important to that heritage.

These papers describe how American Indian tribes and traditional Hispanic communities can use the authority of the National Historic Preservation Act and the National Register to assure that traditional cultural properties eligible for the National Register are considered in project planning. The National Register Criteria for Evaluation can be used to help recognize and protect properties important to all cultural groups on lands under their jurisdiction as well as those that are not. This is very important as the authors of "Working Together: The Roles of Archeology and Ethnohistory in Hopi Cultural Preservation" emphasize, "the Hopis today face a situation where they are concerned not only about the preservation of sacred areas, ancestral graves, and cultural sites on their own reservation, but also in other areas being developed where they have no jurisdiction." (p.2)

As the nation's inventory of its cultural resources, the National Register can be broadly used for heritage education, as well as for planning. It now includes well over 61,000 listings encompassing nearly 900,000 buildings sites, structures and objects. Registration itself provides national recognition and verification of the worth of traditional cultural properties and the people they represent. As Toni Lee discusses, the registration of places important to the diverse groups that make up our multicultural society is not new.

While it may not be appropriate for cultural groups to release information about certain places, there are many traditional cultural properties that can be formally registered where the information about them is not confidential or only selective information should be secured. With the expanded authority of Section 304 of the National Historic Preservation Act provided by the 1992 amendments, there is broad discretion to withhold information that is confidential and still list traditional cultural properties, even those for which selective information should be kept confidential.

An index of National Register listings has been published by the American Association for State and Local History and is now available from the Preservation Press of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. A new comprehensive index will be published by the Preservation Press in 1994. This index is available in many libraries. Anyone may write or call the National Park Service to obtain copies of National Register registration documentation on listed resources, except for information that should be kept confidential because it falls under Section 304. Thousands of researchers order copies of National Register documentation each year. States, federal agencies, Indian tribes, and communities learn what others have done so that they too can survey, nominate similar properties to the National Register, and protect these resources. The descriptions, statements of significance, maps, photographs, bibliographical references and other materials in National Register listing files are an invaluable, unique record of cultural resources nationwide.

These records are accessible because they are all indexed in the computerized National Register Information System (NRIS), where any combination of about 45 data elements can be used to identify properties by such indicators as associated ethnic groups, cultural affiliation, areas and periods of significance, and so forth. This capability helped the National Register staff identify the nearly 800 properties associated with African-Americans being used to produce the first in what is planned as a series of books that will highlight places that reflect the heritage and contributions of different cultural groups.

Using the National Register in a variety of ways to educate Americans and making the records accessible to the public for different types of interpretive and educational uses are high priorities. After all, the taxpayers' money has been invested in collecting the information that records and recognizes our shared heritage. For instance, the National Register staff is working with the Soil Conservation Service to adapt a slide show on traditional cultural properties prepared for SCS by Tom King. The slide show will be turned into a videotape that shows how traditional cultural properties representing a number of traditional cultural groups meet the National Register cri-

(Shull—continued on page 8)

(Shull—continued from page 6)

teria. Like the National Register bulletins, the videotape will be broadly distributed to encourage the appreciation of traditional cultural properties and their identification, evaluation, registration, and preservation. Another project is the publication of a series of regional travel itineraries that link National Register properties from National Parks to local historic districts to showcase the role of various groups in exploration and settlement, including those of traditional cultures.

The National Register and the National Trust for Historic Preservation have joined together in the new *Teaching with Historic Places* program to produce a series of lesson plans and instructional kits on using historic places in the classroom. A special issue of *CRM* devoted to *Teaching with Historic Places* was published in March of 1993. The very first lesson plan published in the series and reprinted in *CRM* was on the Knife River Indian villages in North Dakota. This native American site is important to a number of contemporary Indian tribes, who have expressed enthusiasm that a lesson plan that showcases the contributions of their people is published and available to use in schools nationwide.

The first kit of lessons now in production on "American Work: American Workplaces" is to include a lesson on Hopi lands that have been farmed since prehistoric times using specialized agricultural techniques which are still highly effective today. Young people will learn how innovative, creative, and adaptable the Hopi have been and how they have contributed to the development of agriculture in arid areas of the Southwest. With lessons such as these, young people will develop greater understanding and appreciation for the contributions of diverse cultural groups in our multicultural society. Traditional cultural groups can create their own lesson plans modeled on the *Teaching with Historic Places* lessons.

The National Register needs to hear from traditional cultural groups about what we should be doing to help them identify, register, protect, and educate Americans about their cultural heritage. The National Register can and should recognize the places that represent the heritage of all cultural groups. We must be mindful that some of the information about traditional cultural properties is not appropriate for release to the public, but if we care about cultural preservation, those of us who participate in studies to identify and document cultural heritage have the responsibility to assure that significant places and the information about them is used responsibly to educate our citizens about their values.

Carol D. Shull is Chief of Registration, National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service.

(Lee—continued from page 7)

From its inception, the National Register of Historic Places provided federal recognition of the national, statewide, and local historical values that were found in communities and their cultural groups nationwide. As historic preservation tools developed over the past 27 years at all levels of government, properties listed in the National Register became beneficiaries of financial incentives and environmental regulation. The process of identifying, eval-

uating, and registering properties for the National Register often served important educational purposes. Information accumulated during the nomination process is used for interpretive signs, brochures, and other publications and can be used for educational purposes.

It was largely in the area of identifying and evaluating properties at the local level of significance that much of the ethnic and cultural diversity in the National Register emerged. Preparers of National Register nominations are at the forefront of discovering and documenting Chinese mining sites in Idaho, Finnish and Czech settlements in South Dakota, and African Americans in Texas agricultural history. In the National Register Information System (NRIS), properties associated with African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanics, Asians, Pacific-Islanders, European groups, and other cultural or ethnic groups can be sorted and pulled from the database. Although nearly 2,000 National Register properties are classified and encoded as associated with one of these ethnic and cultural groups, many more National Register properties could be associated with the nation's cultural and ethnic groups if additional documentation were available and properties reevaluated.

National Register Bulletin 38 was a milestone in the evolution of the National Register because it provided a specific mandate for addressing cultural and ethnic heritage and the heritage of "living cultures." The roots of the publication can be found in the ferment in historical and anthropological studies of the 1970s and 1980s and in the discussions of and publications on cultural conservation and American folklife and culture. Although not classified as such, a significant number of traditional cultural properties are listed in the National Register. It is important to note that eligibility for and listing in the National Register requires demonstrated significance under at least one National Register criterion. Many properties include aspects of traditional cultural significance, which were not documented in the nomination form at the time of submission to the nominating authority and to the National Register of Historic Places. However, these additional aspects, such as traditional cultural significance, should be noted where they exist and added to the documentation when feasible.

In recent years, the National Register of Historic Places has listed and determined eligible a number of properties specifically for their traditional cultural values. They include the listing in the National Register of Kuchamaa (Tecate Peak) in California, a sacred mountain unique to the ethnic identity of the Kumeyaay Indians, and a determination of eligibility for the Sandia Sandbars in the Rio Grande River, New Mexico, used by generations of the Sandia Pueblo people for rituals involving immersion in the river's waters. National Register Bulletin 38 provided important guidance for the identification, documentation, and evaluation of these properties. Doubtless, future National Park Service publications and technical assistance as well as those of other organizations and agencies, will draw attention to the heritage of America's cultural and ethnic groups in order to increase appreciation, protection, and interpretation.

Antoinette J. Lee is a historian with the National Register of Historic Places, Interagency Resources Division, National Park Service.